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Viewing cable 06DAMASCUS3701, ASAD CONFIDENT ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION, WELCOMES

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06DAMASCUS3701**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DAMASCUS3701	2006-07-27 13:41	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Damascus

Appears in these articles:

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VZCZCXRO2863
OO RUEHAG
DE RUEHDM #3701 2081341
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271341Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0617
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0153
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0132
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 003701

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2015
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SUBJECT: ASAD CONFIDENT ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION, WELCOMES
U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche, per 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Syrian President Bashar al-Asad met for an hour July 25 with David Lesch, his American biographer, who is in country with his family for a short visit. Asad appeared relaxed and confident about the way events were playing out in Lebanon. He mentioned the possibility of Syrian intervention in the conflict but did not seem to be considering the option in a serious way, according to Lesch. Asad expressed a desire for an American mediation effort that would include Syria, Lesch told the Charge during a subsequent readout. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Syrian President Bashar al-Asad appeared confident and relatively content with the way the situation in Lebanon has played out, according to his American biographer, David Lesch, who met with him at his in-town residence, Tishreen Palace, July 25. Lesch provided a readout for Charge and PolChief the following day, noting that Asad clearly communicated the sense that "he had been dealt back into the game" as a result of the two weeks of fighting in Lebanon between Israel and Hizballah. Asad did not seem worried that Israel would eventually crush Hizballah with its overwhelming military superiority. According to Lesch, Asad at one point noted that the image of Israeli military invincibility had been destroyed in the current conflict.

¶3. (C) Asad spoke at one point about the possibility of Syria entering the war if Israel invaded Lebanon. Lesch said he responded that Israel had already done so, and asked Asad if he had any line in mind that, if crossed, would trigger Syrian intervention. Asad told him that his generals were looking at this issue and considering different scenarios, a response that to Lesch indicated that Asad's mention of the possibility was more rhetorical than real.

¶4. (C) When asked if Syria would accept diplomatic mediation by European parties to help resolve the conflict in Lebanon, Asad said he would not rule out such efforts, but voiced a preference for U.S. engagement directly with Syria on this and other issues. In response to Lesch's inquiry about President Bush's offhand comments about Syria to PM Blair, Asad laughed and said that in general he was pleased because it indicated that the U.S. was at least thinking about Syria. Asad expressed a longing for a comprehensive approach that would reach beyond the current conflict and include issues such as the occupied Golan Heights. He noted wistfully that if he could succeed in getting the Golan back, he would be a hero to the Syrian people. (According to Lesch, although Asad did not refer to Iran directly or the issue of facilitating Iranian support for Hizballah, several other officials with whom he met separately insisted that Syria would abandon its alliance with Iran if the U.S. would engage and stop trying to isolate and pressure Syria.)

¶5. (C) Lesch's wife and 16-year old son accompanied him to an initial 20-minute meeting with Asad that also included First Lady Asma al-Asad. Lesch described the interaction between the couple as natural and informal, with the normal back-and-forth banter of a couple obviously at ease with each other. Asad spoke in English, without interpreter, during the private one-on-one the two subsequently held. Asad lent his camera to Lesch's son. He held out the possibility he might meet with Lesch again before he departed the evening of July 26.

¶6. (C) Lesch met a range of Syrian officials, including Minister of Higher Education Ghiath Barakat, as well as other prominent Syrians, at a series of dinners and other more informal encounters. He also gave an interview on Syrian TV. Lesch is the author of Bashar al-Asad, the Lion of Damascus. He noted that Asad was aware that he would be seeing USG officials after his meeting and assumed Asad wanted to use such meetings to inform and help shape USG perceptions.

